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ABSTRACT

Many undergraduate courses can be easily modified for televised instruction. However, courses such as group work require weekly writing, have major expectations of practice, and necessitate immediate feedback, and so need considerable revamping for televised instruction. Ways to achieve this modification are covered here. The first consideration is to identify the course components that would easily transfer to televised instruction. Components that transfer easily to video instruction are lectures; demonstrations; test, term, and research papers; media; and student questioning. Some of the components involved in teaching group work--group leadership, group dynamics, and group process--do not transfer as easily. Such classes need immediate instructor feedback and a measure of student interaction. Weekly writing assignments may present a problem because, due to class size, it may not be feasible for the instructor to read, make comments, and grade all of the assignments. Likewise, personal journals could not be assured privacy. The model for teaching televised instruction shifts emphasis from process to content, and from the affective to the cognitive. The components for the model are preparation, practice, feedback, and evaluation. The revised focus for teaching on television involves learning theories, instructional theory, and researching content. Other suggestions for televising courses are offered. (RJM)

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# Teaching Group Work on Teletechnet

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## Introduction

Adapting any course for televised instruction involves considerable thought and effort. It becomes necessary to rethink course objectives, class experiences, the level and extent of assignments, testing and other evaluation procedures, and expected learning outcomes. One cannot simply translate an on-campus class to a televised class.

Many of our undergraduate human services courses could be more easily modified for televised instruction because of their focus on theory and other didactic material. Courses that emphasize lecture, discussion, and other cognitive experiences can be modified with a minimum of effort. However, courses that have major expectations of practice, immediate feedback from the instructor, require weekly writing, and extensive student interaction and participation, e.g. experiential activities, are not easily modified and require considerable revamping. The course on group work falls into the latter category.

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On Campus Model for Undergraduate Group Class

The model that was used for on-campus instruction in group work emphasized the following components; student participation in a weekly small group experience over the semester, weekly journal writing that focused on identification of dynamics in the small group, process over content, and weekly demonstrations of group processing via a fishbowl. This model could not be adapted for televised teaching because ethical concerns over safety and appropriate self-disclosure, inability to provide timely feedback to weekly journal entries, the possibility that there would be too few students at any one site to form a small group (the minimum needed was five students), inability of the instructor to supervise the small groups, inaccessibility of the instructor for consultation over personal issues that may emerge in the small group, and other ethical concerns such as confidentiality.

Developing a Model for Televised Instruction

It became necessary to develop a new model for teaching group work via television. The first consideration was to identify the course components that would easily transfer to televised instruction. Components that transfer easily to televised instruction are lectures, demonstrations, tests, term and research papers, media and student questioning.

Lectures are the one component that can be transferred easily to television instruction. While the instructor must be well prepared and have graphics prepared in advance, the same lectures used for on-campus instruction can be modified for televised instruction.

Instructors can continue to give demonstrations. It may not be advisable to have fishbowl processing as a demonstration because of safety and confidentiality issues, but other demonstrations of group leadership skills can be provided.

Tests can also transfer easily to televised instruction. The instructor may have to limit the use of essay questions because there may be 70 to 100 students in a class and it becomes difficult to grade these in a timely manner, but some sort of testing can still be accomplished.

Term or research papers could still be used. Writing is still an important component for the course although the on-campus model accomplished this with weekly journal entries instead of term or research papers. An instructor should consider the number of students in the class as well as the time frame for handing in assignments prior to the end of the semester.

Media, such as videos, can be used in televised instruction but can be a problem when trying to secure permissions for using on television. Any copyrighted material has to be approved in advance of use in televised instruction and permissions can be costly.

There is usually interactive audio for televised instruction, and a few places have interactive video. Students can ask questions almost as easily as they can in classes on campus so that this is another component that can be transferred to televised instruction.

Components That Do Not Translate Easily to Televised Instruction

Teaching group leadership, dynamics and process presents some challenges that other courses do not. The on-campus model provides for the kind of personal involvement from students that cannot be facilitated when the class is televised. Following are some components that do not translate easily to televised instruction for almost any course, and some that are unique to the on-campus model used for teaching group work. Components that do not transfer easily are group sessions, feedback from the instructor that is immediate and personal, weekly writing assignment homework, interactions between students, and practice with immediate feedback.

As has been mentioned before, ethical considerations impact the use of small group sessions. The instruction cannot supervise sessions, there may not be enough students to form a group at any one site, confidentiality and appropriate self-disclosure cannot be effectively monitored.

On-campus students can more easily receive immediate feedback from instructors, consult on personal issues that may have emerged in the group, and explore career development concerns. Technology does permit some of this to be done at a distance, but the personal contact is more difficult to achieve. Further, it is possible that the instructor will never see the student and lose much of the communication message because nonverbal behavior cannot be observed.

It was impossible to institute weekly writing assignments, such as a journal, because of class size and, more importantly, because it is not feasible for the instructor to read, make comments, and grade all of the assignments. The on-campus students were assured that only the instructor reads the journals and could feel free to explore personal issues if they wished. The same assurances cannot be given distant learners as there are usually over 70 students in each class.

Homework, in group class, has the same constraints as does journals. There is usually a personal involvement component in group class and students need to have freedom of expression. Immediate feedback, confidentiality, and grading are so difficult to achieve that it is impossible to do with confidence.

The interaction of students can be achieved on a very limited basis. Students can work with each other, either at the site or at differing sites but will find it very difficult to conduct a group over the semester if members are not physically present. The purpose of the group is to

teach group dynamics, and lack of observation omits a very valuable part of the learning experience.

Practice with immediate feedback can also be achieved but is much less effective than in the regular classroom. The instructor can listen in but cannot observe and notice what is happening from a distance. It is impossible for the instructor to observe nonverbal behavior, the most important part of the message.

Components in The Model

After careful consideration the model for teaching developing and conducting groups was designed around the need for teaching group leadership for psychoeducational groups. This model could be used for televised instruction as the emphases shifts from process to content; from affective to cognitive; and group leaders are prepared to develop and lead a variety of psychoeducational groups.

The components for the model are preparation, practice, feedback and evaluation. Preparation involves didactic instruction, experience in both leading a group and being a group member, and reflection on the experiences. Practice involves planning a psychoeducational group experience, conducting the experience, and receiving immediate feedback on the leadership. Feedback requires participation as a group member and giving feedback to the leader, and observing sessions and giving feedback to the leader. Evaluation includes written self-evaluation of leadership skills and instructor evaluation of the quality of the group plan and execution, and the quality of feedback given as a participant and as an observer.

Revised Focus for Televised Instruction

The revised focus for teaching the group course on television has three emphases; learning theories, instructional theory and researching content. Learning theories are presented to highlight different approaches to the question to how learning occurs. Instruction theory introduces the concepts that have been found through research to be effective in promoting learning. Researching content for psychoeducational groups becomes more important for psychoeducational groups and is emphasized.

The revised focus also deemphasizes process. While process is still important, psychoeducation groups make less use of it to further development of the group and to work on personal issues. Since the cognitive component is highlighted, the process component becomes less important.

Additional opportunities are provided for practicing group leadership skills as students are responsible for planning and conducting a group, not just facilitating a session or being a group member.

Emphasis is also given to planning for different groups, such as educational groups, social skills training groups, work-related groups, and self-help and support groups.

The revised focus preserved the incorporation of group stages and illustrates how they occur even in short term psychoeducational groups. Helpful group factors also play a part and are a focus. Considerable attention is given to the structuring of exercises and games to promote both cognitive and affective learning and development.

The model that was finally developed and used for the class incorporated the strategies of didactics, experiencing and reflecting. Didactic involved lectures, discussions, readings and

demonstrations. Experiencing included planning a psychoeducational group, conducting a group sessions and participating as a member in one or more sessions. Reflecting was accomplished via giving feedback when participating as a member, observing sessions and giving feedback, and self-evaluation.

Summary

Some major point to remember when trying to adapt a group course for televised instruction are preparation, staying focused, be willing to change, limit the amount of information presented and screen out nice to know but irrelevant information.

Be well prepared. Televised instruction demands a high degree or preplanning and organization. You cannot return to your office fore needed materials and must have everything on hand in the studio.

Whatever you do stay focused, to the point and be concrete. You will not be able to see gestures of confusion or lack of understanding. The more precise and concrete you can be, the more your distant students will learn and retain.

The most difficult task is to let go of cherished concepts and practices. Revising the model for teaching group dynamics was very difficult and required considerable adjustment on my part. The pay-off was worth it as a whole new area opened up.

Give less information than you want to cannot be overemphasized. It is very easy to overwhelm with information.

Finally, you will have to screen out irrelevant and extraneous information. Enhancing your presentations is enticing but must be resisted. Concentrate on that which is most important and both you and your students will be satisfied.